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238

Rep. Smith Spearheads Deborah Aid

The House of Representatives today approved an amendment offered by Rep. Christopher H. Smith (R-Hamilton) that would permit the Deborah Heart and Lung Center in Browns Mills to be reimbursed by the Civilian Health and Medical Program for the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS) when they provide care to retired military personnel, their families and the families of active duty personnel.

During floor consideration of the Department of Defense (DoD) authorization bill, the House unanimously approved Smith's amendment which would allow CHAMPUS reimbursement to philanthropic health care institutions such as Deborah.

Smith pointed out that current regulations prevent CHAMPUS from reimbursing programs where the patient has no legal obligation to pay. One of a very few non-profit hospitals, Deborah serves patients without regard to ability to pay. Deborah is supported through its extensive third party billing procedures and its over 70,000 dedicated volunteers in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and Florida.

"Because of Deborah's laudable commitment to saving lives regardless of ability to pay, it has been denied CHAMPUS funding, Medicare, Medicaid, Blue Cross, commercial insurance carriers and HMO's all reimburse Deborah for the life saving care it provides," Smith said.

Smith said that over the years, thousands of military dependents and retirees have been treated at Deborah on both an inpatient and an outpatient basis. "All of these costs as well as those attributable to the considerable array of outpatient services provided for CHAMPUS patients are now being borne by Deborah," Smith said in a speech on the House floor. "By denying payment for CHAMPUS-eligible patients, I believe the federal government is abdicating its responsibility and cheating Deborah of monies owed."

Deborah Heart and Lung Center's proximity to three military institutions (Fort Dix, McGuire Air Force Base, and Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center) leads many DoD-related personnel to treatment there.

61